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More scholarship money now available from R.I.

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Thanks to a last-minute boost in state financing, thousands of college students from Rhode Island will see their state scholarships grow, and 2,100 students on a waiting list will receive grants from the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority.

Governor Carcieri's spending plan called for \$10 million in grants for low-income college students — a \$4.3-million increase over last year.

But officials at the state's Higher Education Assistance Authority worried that their budget would be level-funded because of the state's severe budget deficit. The authority had alerted 12,200 students and parents this spring via e-mail, telling them to expect less money. The maximum state scholarship of \$1,400, for example, would probably drop to \$1,200 for the 2007-'08 academic year.

The state grants range from a

few hundred dollars to \$1,400, based on income, and the average grant is \$1,200.

In the final days of the legislative session, lawmakers approved the governor's request.

Last week, the authority was sending out happier messages to students, letting them know they can budget for the bigger scholarship.

"We are sending the e-mails out as we speak," said Mary Ann Welch, director of program administration. "We can put them back up to \$1,400, and we'll be able to help about 2,100 students on the late-applicant wait list."

A total of 5,540 students are on the waiting list, so about half will now be helped.

Another proposal by the governor, to set aside \$5 million for a new merit-based scholarship program that would have paid tuition and fees at any of the state's three public colleges for about 900 low-income students, failed to pass the legislature.